

Book Reviews

Inventum Novum, by LEOPOLD AUENBRUGGER. A facsimile of the first edition with Corvisart's French translation (1808), Forbes's English translation (1824) Ungar's German translation (1843). Edited with a biographical account by MAX NEUBURGER, London, reprinted by Dawsons of Pall Mall, 1968, £7.

This facsimile reprint of Auenbrugger's *Inventum Novum* is a very welcome addition to the series of classical medical works now being presented to the medical profession. This particular work is a reprint of that produced by Professor Max Neuburger in 1922. Its production is particularly welcome because the Latin facsimile is accompanied by Corvisart's French translation, the English translation made by Forbes, as well as Ungar's German translation; the book is completed by a biography of Auenbrugger by Professor Neuburger.

Medical classics, like their literary counterparts, tend to be honoured only in their titles, few trouble much with their text. For example, though almost every medical man knows that Auenbrugger introduced the method of percussion, only a very few will have read his book. Some of these classics contain a store of sound medical observations still relevant to clinicians today. This work of Auenbrugger is a case in point. The perusal of it will reveal syndromes of advanced tuberculosis of the lungs and lung abscess not now commonly seen in this country but still plentiful in other parts of the world; and Auenbrugger describes them well in relation to his findings on percussion. He also gives a good clinical picture of pericardial effusion and cardiac tamponade, although he fails to recognize the pathological significance of the signs of the latter.

Percussion nowadays receives relatively little attention in the teaching of clinical examination since the evidence it provides is so often more accurately presented by X-rays. There are however, many parts of the world, and many circumstances everywhere, in which X-rays are not available and then this old technique comes into its own and reveals its value. Those of us who still use the method would do well to read what Auenbrugger has to say about his technique in his chapter on the methods of percussion, for here he brings out valuable points often omitted today.

The fate of this little classic carries a message to us today. Though Auenbrugger expected it to be received with slander and abuse it suffered in fact a worse fate than any he envisaged, that of neglect for some fifty years, until Corvisart rescued it. Even in the eighteenth century there were evidently great difficulties in picking out a vitally important contribution from contemporary medical chatter. How much more difficult it is now. How many modest twentieth-century contributions from present-day Auenbrugger-equivalents are similarly slipping quietly down the drain of neglect?

KENNETH D. KEELE

Essays in the History of Embryology and Biology, by JANE M. OPPENHEIMER, Cambridge, Mass., Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1967, pp. xi, 374, £5.

These thirteen essays, together with a postscript on recent publications, constitute a volume indispensable to all who are concerned in the history of ideas in biology, and in the history of philosophical edifices that have been built on them, often on

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very shaky foundations. Professor Oppenheimer is not only a rigorously scholarly historian of fact, but is also one of the most astute and penetrating interpreters of the history of philosophical biology alive today. It is splendid to have her major articles, hitherto scattered as contributions to books and learned journals, brought together in such a handsome format.

The writing spans nearly a quarter of a century, starting with the masterly 1940 *Quarterly Review of Biology* essay on 'The Non-Specificity of the Germ-Layers', and ending with a 1964 lecture to the International Congress of Biology on 'Questions Posed by Classical Descriptive and Experimental Embryology'. Her special period is the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and there is no doubt that her patient record of its achievements, hopes and disappointments, will form a permanent monument to that most ingenious and industrious age. But on occasion she brings her skills to bear on earlier periods, and the arrangements of the book allows us to progress backwards from 'John and William Hunter and Some Eighteenth Century Scientific Moods', to 'John Hunter, Sir Thomas Browne and the Experimental Method', then on to 'William Harvey and Historical Change', to bring us finally to the sixteenth century with 'William Gilbert: Plant Grafting and the Grand Analogy'.

People and ideas are the stuff of history. One is grateful for these brilliant expositions of so many of both.

BERNARD TOWERS

Magie, Médecine et Possession à Gondar, by MAXIME RODINSON, Paris, Mouton, 1967, pp. 203, Fr.25.

Traditional Ethiopian medicine is of considerable interest, in part because of the existence of written medical texts in Gees, which date back to late medieval times and have created a significant element of continuity, and in part on account of the country's great differences in altitude, and hence in climate, which have resulted in a remarkably wide range of flora, thus enabling the emergence of a particularly rich herbal pharmacopoeia.

Professor Rodinson, a distinguished French linguist and Ethiopicist, has rendered a signal service by providing us with an annotated translation, as well as the text, of a fairly detailed survey of the traditional magico-medical practitioners of Gondar written in Amharic for the Mission Dakar-Djibouti of 1932. This hitherto unpublished document gives the names, places of residence, disease or diseases for which such practitioners were renowned, their methods of treatment, and the amount the patients were expected to pay, and reveals, by implication, the degree to which they employed either medical or magical cures or a combination of the two.

Of no less interest Professor Rodinson has appended to this work a very useful and scholarly account of the principal features of traditional medicine and medical magic in Ethiopia, and a discussion on the traditional practitioners, their pharmacopoeia and nosology, as well as a very extensive bibliography on these subjects.

RICHARD PANKHURST